

Date: May 11, 2011

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Through: Theodore L. Voorhees, Deputy City Manager
Mark D. Ahrendsen, Director, Transportation Department
From: Andy Henry, Transportation Planner
Subject: Agenda Item – Presentation and Resolution on Bus and Rail Transit Investment Plan for Durham and Orange Counties

Executive Summary

This briefing is to update the City Council on ongoing planning efforts concerning regional and local transit. The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) has conducted an Alternatives Analysis of two regional rail corridors that are in Durham City and County. The light rail transit corridor extends from UNC-Chapel Hill to Duke University and downtown Durham and to Alston Avenue. The commuter rail corridor extends from west Durham (near Fulton Street) through the RTP to the Durham/Wake county line. The Alternatives Analysis provides the cost, ridership, environmental and public input data for these rail services, and will inform the process to conduct a potential local referendum to use new local revenue sources, such as a ½ cent sales tax, to fund bus and rail transit investments, and to apply for a federal New Start funding grant for light rail transit. In addition, Durham County and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) have developed a plan for proposed improvements to local and regional bus service that are coordinated with the expectations of the light rail and commuter corridors.

The Durham County and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) voted to release a draft financial plan for the local referendum (Durham City Council has two members on the DCHC MPO board). The Durham County Board of Commissioners will be responsible for approving the financial plan for these passenger rail and bus transit services and, if desired, calling for the local tax referendum.

The briefing will cover the schedule of these planning efforts, the financial plan and local referendum. City Council will be asked to approve a resolution of support for moving forward with the financial plan.

Recommendation

Receive the staff presentation, provide comments, and approve Resolution of the Durham City Council in Support of the Bus and Rail Investment Plan for Durham and Orange Counties

Background

Several years ago, the Triangle region was notified that the proposed regional rail project would not qualify for federal New Start funding. This action motivated the appointment of a regional commission to study transit, called the Special Transit Advisory Commission (STAC), which submitted its recommendations to the regions two MPOs in May 2008. The recommendations included rail transit extending from Raleigh to Durham to Chapel Hill, and bus transit investments to expand service coverage and quality. The DCHC MPO incorporated the STAC recommendations into the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (2035 LRTP). The Congestion Relief/Intermodal Transport bill was approved in August 2009, enabling local areas to fund public transportation using an increase in the sales tax, car registration fees and special district property taxes, and requiring a Transit Plan to guide the use of such funding. The Durham Board of County Commissioners could be asked to act on the Transit Plan called for in the bill and consider authorizing a referendum for a ½ cent sales tax for transit and/or approving a motor vehicle fee of up to \$7 for transit.

The presentation to City Council will provide an update on two important planning efforts that have resulted from these previous events. The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) has implemented the Triangle Regional Transit Program (TRTP) to study the financial, ridership, environmental and public input aspects of a regional light rail system and identify a light rail segment for application of federal New Start funding. In June, the TRTP held a series of workshops throughout the Triangle region to gather public input on a regional transit vision. Subsequently, the TRTP Transitional Analysis studied six light rail corridors in Durham County and twelve corridors in Wake County to compare the mobility, financial, land use, and socioeconomic performance of the corridors. This screening process identified the top two light rail corridors in terms of performance and these two corridors were studied in an Alternatives Analysis that has provided cost and ridership data as well as alignment and station options. One of these two light rail corridors is in Durham County, i.e., the corridor extends from UNC-Chapel Hill to Duke University and downtown Durham and to Alston Avenue. This light rail corridor could possibly be presented to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for New Start funding. The Alternatives Analysis also provides comparable financial and ridership data for a commuter rail corridor that extends from west Durham (near Fulton Street) through the RTP and through Wake County.

In addition, Durham County and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) have developed a plan for proposed improvements to local and regional bus service that are coordinated with the financial and service expectations of the light rail and commuter corridors.

Issues/Analysis

Durham City Council action is not required for the various decision points in the regional rail project, including the Durham County Element of the Regional Transit Plan (financial plan), local options referendum and Federal New Starts application. However, City Council has an interest in these issues given that the majority of the transit services that are provided and the majority of the collected tax revenues will be in the City of Durham. In addition, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) will need to authorize the Durham County Element of the Regional Transit Plan, and the Durham City

Council has two members on the DCHC MPO policy board (called the Transportation Advisory Committee, or TAC).

Alternatives

1. Receive Presentation and approve resolution
2. Receive Presentation but not approve resolution

Financial Analysis

This agenda item does not have an immediate impact on the City budget. However, if implemented, the regional and local transit plans will have a significant financial impact on the City budget and City of Durham citizens.

SDBE Summary

This item does not require review by the Office of Equal Opportunity /Equity Assurance.

Attachments

- Attachment A: Durham County Bus and Rail Transit Investment Plan.
- Attachment B: Resolution of the Durham City Council in Support of the Bus and Rail Investment Plan for Durham and Orange Counties